

NEW YORK STATE
RURAL LIFE PLAYS

SOIL

By
MAYER PORTNER



SAMUEL FRENCH

Founded 1845

Incorporated 1898

THOS. R. EDWARDS, *Managing Director*
25 *West 45th Street* . *New York City*

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NEW YORK STATE RURAL LIFE PLAYS

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25 West 45th Street, New York, N. Y.

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MAYER PORTNER

Plays written for contests conducted under the auspices of Cornell University with the cooperation of the New York Department of Farms and Markets, New York State Grange, New York State Farm Bureau Federation, the New York State Federation of Home Bureaus and the Grange League Federation.

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TMP 96-006856

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DEC 29 1928

To Judith

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JOHN LANE.....*An old farmer*
MRS. LANE.....*His wife*
TED LANE.....*His son*
MR. SANDERS.....*A hotel keeper*
MR. THOMPSON.....*A lawyer*

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A mountain resort in New York State.

SOIL

The living-room of a farmhouse in the mountain districts of Southern New York. On the right a table with three chairs around it. On the left a sofa. In the center a door leading to the outside. On both sides of the door, hooks in the wall on which all kinds of automobile accessories are hanging—old tire tubes, skid chains, etc. Near the sofa, upper left on a small table a telephone with a directory. On the right a door to the kitchen which is kept open due to the warm weather.

As the curtain rises, discovered JOHN LANE, his wife and son finishing the noontday meal. LANE is a man of sixty, enjoying good health as becomes a hard-working outdoor man. He carries himself erect and moves about with the steady, confident step of a man who knows what to do at all times. His hair is white but his face still shows signs of vigorous health. He is dressed in a blue shirt and overalls. His son is about medium in height, slender and with delicate features. He wears a pair of dark gray trousers, a striped shirt, a soft collar and a bow tie. The mother is a small, white-haired woman of fifty with a face that still shows signs of former beauty.

LANE. The pie tastes very good to-day. Just as I told Mr. Sanders the other day when he asked me to have dinner at his place. I told him that his chef could never bake pie like you do. "Why,"

he says to me, "I've got the best chef in the mountains, a wonderful cook." So I says to him, "He may be a good cook but he'll never make the kind of pies my wife makes." (MRS. LANE *smiles at him and begins gathering the dishes, carrying them into the next room.*) Ted, what are you doing this afternoon?

TED. I'm going down to the station to meet the train and then go over to Mr. Sanders' place to see if anybody wants to go riding this afternoon.

MRS. LANE. Ted, be sure to put chains on the tires. It rained very hard last night and the roads will be slippery.

LANE. Listen, Ted, never mind going down to the station this afternoon, I want you to help me a little around the farm.

TED. What do you want now?

LANE. I want you to help me spray the potatoes. After last night's rain we ought to have a stretch of good weather so if we spray the potatoes now and then hoe 'em up a little, they'll be in good shape. I've got the stuff all mixed and ready to spray.

TED. I can't help you now. I've got to meet the train.

LANE. Meet the train! That's all you know is meet the train. How about the potatoes, and the rest of the work on the farm? I can't do it all myself.

TED. I help with the milking, don't I?

LANE. He helps me with the milking! That's very nice of you. And how about the rest of the work on the farm? There's corn to cultivate and potatoes to hoe and the oats will be ready to cut in another couple of weeks. I can't do it without your helping us. (TED *rises from the sofa and begins taking some chains from the wall. An old tire tube falls off, he picks it up and examines it, finds a hole in it and begins to patch it. During the rest of the*

scene he is busy patching the tube.) Well, what do you say, Ted? You gonna help me spray the potatoes?

TED. No, sir; not to-day; and I don't think I can help you any more during the summer. The season is pretty well under way, and the hotels are filling up with boarders. There's too much money to be made with the car to let it stand around and help you with the farm work.

LANE. And let the farm go to the dogs, eh?

TED. No, you don't have to do that. You can sell it.

LANE. What?

TED. Sell the farm. Mr. Sanders is willing to buy it.

LANE. Willing to buy it, is he? So he spoke to you too, eh? Well, you can tell Mr. Sanders that he better get it out of his head. I won't sell this place. I was born and raised here, lived here all my life—so did my father before me—and I expect to see you do the same.

TED. If it was up to me I'd sell this place to-morrow and buy a garage with the money. I could make more money in one month than you can make on the farm in a whole season.

LANE. Well, as long as I live, you won't do it, you lazy, good-for-nothing loafer.

MRS. LANE. (*Entering from the other room*) John, don't yell at the boy. He is not a lazy loafer. He works hard enough driving that car at all hours of the night. If you'd sell the farm and give him the money to buy the garage down the village we could all live without working so hard.

LANE. I ain't afraid of hard work. Nobody in my family ever was. We've always been hard-working farmers. My father used to work from morning till night every summer day and even in the winter time he was busy doing something, and

taught me to work hard. And to think that I have a son who sits in his car all day like an old hen. He sure didn't get the lazy spirit from me.

MRS. LANE. He isn't lazy at all.

TED. If you're gonna listen to me and sell the farm so that I can get that garage down the village, we'll be a darn sight better off than we are now.

LANE. You catch me sell the farm and loafing around the village! Why, I'd get rusty from not doing any work.

MRS. LANE. You can work around the garage and help Ted. And when it isn't so busy you could work on the garden in back of the house. You could raise some cabbage and some beans and maybe a little potatoes to keep us going for a while.

LANE. Me work a little two by four garden in the back yard! Me that's used to climbing up on a hill and look over acres and acres of corn and oats that I planted, you want me to plant two rows of beans and cabbage and then play around with a rake and hoe like a small boy. Will that take the place of plowing the land in the spring, turning over one furrow of soil after the other till the whole field is turned over; or pitching on a big load of hay and mowing it away in the barn in the summer time; or harvesting and threshing the oats and husking the corn in the fall of the year. There's a man's work for you and that's what I have done all my life. . . . And you expect me to give up all that for a little garden in a back yard down the village. I guess not. I won't sell this farm as long as I live and just as soon as he gets a little sense in that fool head of his, he'll be feeling the same way.

TED. I don't care what you say, I'll never work on the farm any more.

LANE. That's a fine thing to say, isn't it? You didn't talk that way when you wanted to buy the car and needed money. Then it was, "Oh, I'll help

you, Dad, just the same. I'll run the car only at night and on Sundays." And now you won't do any work at all. There's a good son for you, a son like that ought never to have been born.

MRS. LANE. John Lane, I wish you wouldn't talk that way! He is your son——

LANE. (*Interrupting*) My son, eh? Well, he don't act like his father. He is more like you than me anyway. That's what I get for letting you educate him. When he was sixteen, I wanted to put him to work and make a good farmer out of him, but you couldn't see it. You wanted him to go to high school. What did you want to do, make a school teacher out of him?

MRS. LANE. You thought a whole lot of school teachers when you were courting me.

LANE. I was a fool those days.

(MRS. LANE *begins to cry.*)

TED. Don't cry, Mom, and never mind him. I'll buy that garage anyway, even if I have to borrow money to do it. And you see if he don't change his mind after a while and sell the place.

LANE. I'll never sell this farm.

TED. We'll see about it. Anyway, I ain't gonna stay here all day and argue about it with you. (*He hangs the tube back on the wall.*)

LANE. I don't care if you argue till you're blue in the face. I won't sell this farm, that's all. And you could have been out in the field with me and working instead of standing here and talking. But there'll be no more talking on the subject in this house, young man. And what's more, you better make up your mind that you're going to help me on the farm or you'll be sorry.

TED. I won't do a bit of work on that damn farm of yours.

LANE. (*In a rising voice*) Damn farm, is it, eh? I'll show you, worthless pup. Where is the ax? (*He makes a move toward the kitchen.*) I'll smash that car of yours to pieces.

TED. No, you won't, you old fool. (*He goes out by the center door, slamming the door after him.*)

MRS. LANE. (*Comes in from the kitchen and calls to her husband as he is about to follow TED out of doors*) There, John, calm yourself. What's the matter with you, anyway?

LANE. What's the matter! . . . Didn't you hear him call me an old fool? Oh, to raise such an ungrateful pup and to hear him call you names! (*He sits down in a chair.*)

MRS. LANE. (*Coming over to him and putting her hands on his shoulder*) Oh, he didn't mean it. . . . John, why don't you be nice to the boy instead of always fighting with him? He's not a bad sort. What if he doesn't work on the farm? He's making good with the car and I guess he'd make out all right with the garage if he'd buy it. After all, he's our son, the only one we've got so let's make him happy.

LANE. (*Exasperated*) Are you going to start where he left off? Great Scott, can't I have peace in my own home at all? Everybody turning against me. (*He rises and goes out through the kitchen, slamming the outer door behind him.* MRS. LANE watches him go out and goes over to the door in the center.)

MRS. LANE. I wonder if Ted has gone away? (*She trips over the tire chains on the floor.*) Oh, he forgot to take the chains for the tires and the roads are so slippery. That's what happens when they argue and become excited. He runs out and leaves the chains behind. I hope he is careful driving down the hill and around the four corners.

Ever since he bought the car there is nothing but arguments and fights, but I never saw them get mad like this. Sometimes I wish that he had never bought the old car, still it's better than farming. If he could only buy the garage down the village he wouldn't have to drive a car and could make more money too. But if John won't sell the farm, how can he get money to buy the garage? (*A sound of feet being wiped on a door mat outside, followed by a knock on the door.*) Come in.

(*Enter SANDERS and THOMPSON. SANDERS is a man of fifty, medium height, heavy set, thick necked, dressed in the manner of a country gentleman. His hair is turning gray but his face has good color. THOMPSON is a tall, distinguished-looking man, neatly dressed.*)

SANDERS. Good-afternoon, Mrs. Lane.

MRS. LANE. Good-afternoon, Mr. Sanders.

SANDERS. Where's Mr. Lane? I'd like to see him on a business matter.

MRS. LANE. Mr. Sanders, John is a little upset to-day. I think it would be better to see him some other time.

SANDERS. Oh, that's all right. Where is he at? My friend here, Mr. Thompson—(MRS. LANE *courtesies*) who is a lawyer, will talk to him and we'll see what can be done about this deal.

MRS. LANE. Couldn't you come around some other time —

SANDERS. (*Interrupting*) Impossible. Mr. Thompson has to catch the five o'clock train to New York.

MRS. LANE. All right. I'll see if I can find him. He must be way out in the field hoeing potatoes. (*She goes out through the kitchen.*)

(SANDERS sits down and pulls out two cigars from his pocket, offers one to THOMPSON and they both light up.)

THOMPSON. What sort of a man is he anyway?

SANDERS. Oh, one of these stubborn old farmers who won't listen to reason. I spoke to him a couple of times but it's no use, he won't sell.

THOMPSON. What makes you so anxious to buy the place anyway? I thought that he had at least some good buildings on the place, but he hasn't even got that. You can't put any guests in this rickety old shack.

SANDERS. Don't be too sure about that. I've put 'em up in worse places than this. When people come out in the country for a few weeks, they're not particular where they sleep. The main thing is to be in the country and get fresh air. I'll bet I can get as much rent for these rooms as for any room in my hotel. But it isn't only the buildings—it's the farm I'm after. There's a nice lake on the grounds where I can go fishing and guests could go bathing and rowing. That would help my business a good deal. And then he has a whole lot of land that I could use for pasture for my cattle. My own land is rather poor in pasture and I have to buy hay. So I made up my mind to buy the farm and be done with it. When I make up my mind to get something I usually get it, and I'm going to get this farm. (*Footsteps are heard.*) Oh, here he comes now!

SANDERS. How do you do, Mr. Lane? Have a cigar.

LANE. Never mind your cigars. Don't think that you're dealing with my boy now. I know what you came here for, and let me tell you that you're wasting your time. I won't sell this farm and that settles it.

SANDERS. But, Mr. Lane, won't you listen to reason?

LANE. I'll listen to nothing.

SANDERS. But if I offer you a good price?

LANE. You couldn't offer me all the money in the world and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for talking to my boy about it and trying to make him go against his father. But it won't help you a bit. I've lived on this place all my life and so did my father before me, and I expect my boy to do the same thing. He'll settle down and get married and will stay on the farm like the rest of the Lane family.

SANDERS. Mr. Lane, I'll give fifteen thousand dollars for your farm the way it stands. Mr. Thompson, who is a lawyer, is ready to draw up the papers.

LANE. He'll draw up no papers, if I can help it! What do you mean by bringing a lawyer to my house, anyway? Do you think you can make me sell when you bring a lawyer to me? Get out of my home and get out quick. (*He points to the door.*)

SANDERS. All right, you needn't get excited about it. (*He leaves, accompanied by THOMPSON.*)

LANE. (*Wiping his brow with a blue bandana handkerchief*) Talk about having nerve, he beats anybody I ever seen. Brings a lawyer to my house, damn his hide. Thinks he can scare me into selling by bringing a lawyer.

(*The telephone bell rings, MRS. LANE answers it.*)

MRS. LANE. Hello, yes, this is Mrs. Lane; who is this, please? Yes.What? My boy in an accident.He's dead! (*She screams and drops the receiver. She swoons. JOHN LANE has been standing near her and as she falls, catches her in*

his arms. He carries her over to the sofa and begins working on her to revive her. He rushes into the kitchen and returns with some cold water in a dipper. He throws some water on her face and follows it up by pinching her cheeks and vigorously rubbing her wrists. After a while MRS. LANE comes to.)

LANE. Do you feel better now?

MRS. LANE. My Teddy is killed and you, you're to blame.

LANE. Calm yourself, Mary. (MRS. LANE turns her face to the wall crying. LANE leaves her and walks up and down the room wringing his hands. After a short moment he comes over to the sofa and bending over speaks to his wife.) There, Mary, don't cry; it won't help us anyway. He's gone and we can't get him back now. (He lays his hand on her shoulder.)

MRS. LANE. (Shrinking from him) Don't touch me, you murderer, you sent him to his death you — (She breaks down again. Her shoulders heave spasmodically and her words become inaudible. LANE stands before her and tries to say something but the words are lost in his throat. A pause. MRS. LANE turns her face from the wall and is facing her husband. As he catches her eye he masters himself. MRS. LANE, slowly and sobbingly.) If you hadn't jumped on him and got him excited . . . my boy would still be alive and all because he told you to sell the farm. What good is your farm now when we are alone and nobody with us in our old age?

(LANE suddenly walks over to the door and yells.)

LANE. Sanders, hi, Sanders, come back here —

MRS. LANE. Don't call that man here. He's the cause of it all. I don't want him in my

house. . . . (LANE turns around and is about to say something, but cannot find any words. He walks up and down the room.) If it wasn't for him my boy would still be living. You and Ted always got along so well, until that man set the boy thinking of selling the farm.

(Enter SANDERS and THOMPSON. They remain standing in the doorway.)

SANDERS. Well?

LANE. I'm going to sell the farm.

(SANDERS walks down stage triumphantly. THOMPSON follows him.)

SANDERS. That's fine. (Turning to THOMPSON.) I knew he'd listen to reason. We can draw up a bill of sale right now.

MRS. LANE. Don't sell it, John. . . . It's too late anyway. . . .

SANDERS. Why, what's the matter?

(The body of TED is brought in by some neighbors. They carry it to the center of the stage. MRS. LANE screams and falls back on the sofa.)

THOMPSON. Sanders, let us go home. We can't talk business till after the funeral.

(They walk out softly as the curtain descends.)

CURTAIN

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